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SUMMARY

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Public, Parliamentary, and official reaction in Germany to the President's decision to move ahead with the Safeguard ABM system has been less than one would expect from such a far-reaching step. In the public mind this fateful bridge was crossed in September 1967 and the modifications announced in March 14 are not well appreciated. Within the small circle of informed German officials the NPG consultations in the ABM question have gone far to promote understanding. Militarily there is satisfaction that the US has chosen to protect the western deterrent rather than to strive for a city defense which would leave Europe vulnerable and upset the nuclear balance.

Among more sophisticated students of nuclear strategy there are doubts and questions, and a desire for more information on US intentions. Nervousness about the consequences of ABM deployment to the proposed US-Soviet strategic arms limitations talks exists, and there remains an underlying worry about the fate of Europe.

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should the super-powers enter into an ABM race that would aim at achieving invulnerability. The siphoning off of substantial US defense resources into a new weapons system to the extent that US troop commitments might be affected would also trouble the Germans. It is important that the US consult closely with the Germans through NATO and bilateral channels as our program and policies evolve.

End of Summary

1. A sifting of German opinion among personalities in the Foreign Office, Ministry of Defense, Parliament, the press, and the public at large reveals relatively little debate or controversy at this time arising from President Nixon's March 14 announcement of his decision to deploy a limited anti-ballistic missile defense, or from the subsequent Administration statements before the Congress. The German reaction has been conditioned by a number of factors:

a. Former Secretary McNamara's initial announcement of September 1967 provided the somber realization that this new phase of futuristic warfare confronted the world. The most recent decision was in consequence reduced in the public and official mind to a reminder that the ugly problem was still with us.

b. The major question provoked in 1967 was whether Europe too would ultimately require a defensive missile system. However, the highly useful NPG conclusions in Ankara helped to clarify this aspect for German defense planners, and it is no longer a live issue.

c. Among those familiar with the intricacies of the problem there is general satisfaction that the US has chosen to protect its retaliatory capability, and also that the US did not decide to abandon ABM development. There is also some relief that the US has not embarked on an ABM program of such scope as to strain US defense resources to the point where cut-backs in the US conventional forces in Europe might be required.

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d. A general lack of understanding of difference between the McNamara plan and the modifications inherent in the most recent strategy. It is difficult to grasp, for example, how we forego defense of cities and yet aim to give them protection against accidental or Chinese attack.

2. One of the Defense Ministry's chief nuclear defense planners confirmed that relatively little concern, or even attention, had been generated by the President's announcement. They were satisfied by the discussions taking place in the NPG, and felt no lack of consultation. The question of a European system he regarded as being "on ice". Had the US opted for protection of cities as well as its ICBM sites, and should the Soviets do the same, then the Western deterrent would be open to question. Establishment of a thick ABM system on both sides, to the extent that they considered themselves relatively safe would be apt to encourage the Soviets to believe they could risk war. Each side would be more prepared to use nuclear weapons in a European war. However, the present plan favors current Alliance strategy.

3. In his view the Germans would have been equally concerned if the US had decided to suspend or abandon an ABM system. This would have given the Soviets an advantage of strength in any subsequent strategic arms limitation talks (SALT). President Nixon's decision therefore supported the prospects for SALT. A second reason why the MOD was satisfied with our decision to proceed is that as long as the Soviets are moving ahead the US must do so too in order that we stay abreast of the technology. We cannot afford to leave the field to the Soviets and risk some technological breakthrough which would put them ahead.

4. German military acceptance of the US program is not without some questions and doubts, however. They are quite aware that the system as evolved will represent a series of US domestic political compromises, which might result in some functional and strategic degradation. Also, there was some skepticism that the McNamara concept was entirely based on the Chinese threat. This still prevails to some extent. The German staff considers that the US wants also to continue development and to be prepared to expand the system against the Soviet threat if required at some future date. Finally, there is not as yet a full understanding of the Sentinel - now Safeguard - concept. It will take additional time for the German military to become familiar with the technical capabilities, geographical deployment, employment radii, and phasing in of the system.

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5. Discussions with German political leaders generally revealed little alarm over the revised US ABM decision. Neither was much interest or knowledge displayed. By far the most interesting reaction came from a defense adviser to the SPD, recently appointed to a disarmament and policy planning role in the Foreign Office. He confirmed that public concern was minimal but said that in more informed circles there existed a degree of confusion and uncertainty. This group, which obviously included him, realized the need for a review of the ABM problem by the new US Administration but did not fully understand the objectives, intentions and strategy involved in the President's decision, especially as it related to SALT. Some of the more obvious factors visible to the Germans arose from US domestic considerations as reflected in the congressional debate, the desire for budgetary savings, the necessity of protecting the Minute Man sites, and the rationale for the deemphasizing protection of the cities. But all the nuances involved in determination of the US nuclear and counter-nuclear strategy were not known to the German experts. Also undeterminable would be the effect on longer range relations between the US and the USSR.

6. Many knowledgeable Germans welcomed the President's recent decision as evidence of a US determination to remain strong. However, Secretary of Defense Laird had testified that the US decision could still be reversed. Under what conditions would such a reversal take place; if the Soviets were willing to abandon their ABM? Should SALT be postponed for one reason or another and the US ABM went into the deployment phase, would this mark the start of a new arms race? Nothing had been said about the relationship between MIRV and the ABM. What were the dangers of upsetting the present nuclear equilibrium? Among German political leaders there lingered some feel that negotiations between the superpowers could be to the disadvantage of Europe. President Nixon had made it quite clear that he hoped to undertake talks with the USSR on the Near East, the Far East including Vietnam, and perhaps Berlin. How would discussions on these political questions be related to and affected by the progressive emplacement of an ABM system in the US. Students of strategy in Germany

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assumed that one element in the US decision was the necessity to keep abreast scientifically and technologically in the ABM field, particularly should SALT founder. They wondered if it was the unspoken understanding of the superpowers that SALT would deal with offensive weapons only, leaving themselves more latitude to develop defensive capabilities. In this case, what would happen to Europe once the superpowers became invulnerable.

7. Another problem concerned Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Where would the US begin implementation of its nuclear curtailment? Considering the achievement of nuclear equilibrium between the US and USSR perhaps it would be unwise of the non-nuclear nations to exert premature pressures for observance of Article VI. Could the superpowers in fact achieve a balanced and mutual program of arms reduction without threatening to upset the standoff on which the peace now rests? More importantly, what would be the political reaction if people thought the nuclear balance was being destroyed; might not this create secondary political turmoil and imbalances? He thought that significant arms controls and reductions could only take place as a feeling of trust and confidence between the superpowers was developed. Hence political arrangements perhaps ought to precede disarmament agreements which might otherwise de-stabilize the present balance.

8. Our interlocutor maintained that the feeling of security which prevailed in Germany -- based as it was upon the Alliance -- had not been disturbed by the US decision on the ABM. Most people felt that the US had taken a necessary step without over-reacting nor disturbing the nuclear balance at this time. He stressed, however, that the fate of Europe rested on preservation of this balance. He mentioned various studies underway by private and semi-official groups in Germany on the broader question of nuclear stability and the consequences to it of further offensive/defense weapon developments.

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9. Press reaction to the announcement of President Nixon's decision and the ensuing Senate discussion on the ABM defense system has been varied but low key. There was almost unanimous agreement that Nixon met his primary responsibility in thinking first of American security requirements. Whether one agreed with his decision or not, "the grounds he set forth were clear, plain and certainly sincere." (Stuttgarter Zeitung). Die Welt stated "no President could have reached a more calibrated decision". Most papers believed that he prevented an even deeper split in America over the cost of the system which Johnson was considering. Some editorials noted, however, that domestic controversy still exists and Congressional approval is by no means assured. On the international implications of the decision there was less agreement. Handelsblatt said that "President Nixon chose a wise compromise The USA retains a nuclear power large enough to overpower a Soviet ABM system if necessary. Moreover, Nixon will examine his ABM program every year. The door for disarmament negotiations remains open." The Stuttgarter Zeitung was more critical. "In international diplomatic quarters Nixon's decision will increase skepticism regarding the real intentions of the nuclear powers." It added "ABM's in the Soviet Union and in the US again pose the question to the non-nuclear states of how they can provide for their security if the nuclear powers further increase and improve their arsenals." The Sueddeutsche Zeitung felt he created a better negotiating position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. Last week's Der Spiegel was skeptical: "...Until now Nixon had skilfully created the impression that by a new professional conduct of business and solid political workmanship he would more than compensate for his renunciation of far-reaching programs and visionary solutions... (Congressional opposition to the ABM decision) has made it obvious that workmanship and routine do not sufficiently qualify a man to conduct world business. America's problems in Vietnam, Europe and the U.S. cannot be solved by mere thinking on a political seminar pattern. For the first time President Nixon has run into what galled President Johnson -- foreign criticism: Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau described Nixon's ABM decision as a declaration of bankruptcy and a failure of the ideas of humaneness." Press comment in the past week has been almost absent.

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10. Despite the passive response to this most recent step, the future course of ABM development, including the range of public debates, will be carefully followed by German policy makers. The following are some of the issues to which the Germans will be sensitive:

a. Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. President Nixon has identified this to Germany's top leadership as one of the most crucial measures to be pursued by his Administration. The Germans have expressed their support for such negotiations, which we can hope to retain through careful and timely consultations to reassure them that their interests are not being sacrificed to a deal between the superpowers. Should a too ambitious ABM program appear to jeopardize SALT, there would be a concern in Germany particularly among the detente-minded SPD adherents.

b. Extended ABM Deployment. A thickening of our ABM system in the years to come would be troubling both because of the destabilizing effect it would have on the nuclear balance and because it would face the Europeans with the question of erecting their own missile defenses. The objective of a relative or partial invulnerability missile attack by the US and the USSR would leave the European cities as potential hostages - a situation which would force them towards an ABM defense or a refuge in neutrality.

c. Allocation of US Resources to ABMs. The Germans took momentary satisfaction that the President's decision made no new demands on the strained defense budget. However, they are conscious that the addition of a new weapons system, the expense of which can only grow, will compete for scarce military resources including those allocated to US Forces in Europe.

d. Disarmament. Apart from SALT, the German public, much as the American public, regards easily the deployment of an ABM system as a retrograde step along the tortured path to disarmament. It will be an obstacle to implementation as well as the spirit of the NPT and to achievement of a complete test ban treaty.

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e. Consultation. Following the President's pledges to NATO and our Allies individually German officials will expect candid, timely and detailed consultation on US ABM plans. The US strategic deterrent is also fundamental to their security, and its protection becomes a matter of great importance to them. Any reluctance on our part to share information or to provide an opportunity for German questioning will generate concern. The NPG is admirably suited for official exchanges on an Alliance basis, particularly on the more sensitive aspects. However, it may be necessary to supplement this by special briefings for larger Foreign Office and Ministry of Defense audiences. In addition, the Embassy should be provided more detailed technical and conceptual information which can be used with German parliamentarians.

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